Lithuanian Communists' Prestige Rises Sharply

Poll Shows Rise After Party Decided to Defy Gorbachev, Seek Its Independence

By David Remnick
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, Jan. 9—The prestige of the Lithuanian Communist Party has skyrocketed since its decision last month to defy the warnings of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and declare its independence from Moscow, according to an official poll.

Gorbachev, who will visit Lithuania this week, has called the Communists' unprecedented move a "blow to *perestroika*" and Politburo member Vadim A. Medvedev has charged the Lithuanian Communists with making an "unlawful" and "undemocratic" decision.

But a poll by the Academy of Sciences of Lithuania revealed that 82 percent of the republic's population approved of the party's split with Moscow. Moreover, the poll showed that the most popular politician in the republic is party leader Algirdas Brazauskas.

Although there are no official results to show a precise figure, sources within the party and in the popular independence movement Sajudis said that prior to the split, support for the republic's Communist Party was at its lowest and thousands were turning in their party memberships.

The rise of popularity of the Communist Party in Lithuania has also caused confusion in the ranks of Sajudis. The poll showed that Sajudis's leaders, most of them academics

from the cities of Vilnius and Kaunas, had slipped in popularity.

"Sajudis doesn't quite know where it is headed for the moment," said one of the group's leaders Arvydas Juozatis. At a recent meeting of Sajudis, the leadership announced it would try to regain the initiative by holding a pre-election congress on Feb. 3 as a warmup for the republic's legislative elections Feb. 24.

Sajudis said today that it would stage demonstrations during Gorbachev's trip to show support for removing Red Army troops from Lithuanian soil, for a legal renunciation of the treaties in 1939 and 1940 that put Lithuania under Soviet control and for compensation "for the losses and the genocide of

the Lithuanian people and their exile, as well as for the destruction of Lithuania's environment, material goods and national values."

Gorbachev's mission to Lithuania is delicate. As the poll indicates, he cannot isolate the Lithuanian party's "declaration of independence" as the work of a few isolated radicals nor can he attack the move and count on much support within the republic.

The Lithuanians are expecting something more subtle, a compromise that might slow down the movement for independence, but one that tries to harness the political activity and radicalism as a vehicle of support for *perestroika*.

[In Kaunas today, demonstr___ demanding indepen___

fronted Mededev, the Associated Press reported.

"You want to leave the Soviet Union?" Vadim A. Medvedev asked protesters. Medvedev, later on Soviet TV, repeated the question and before receiving an answer, said, "For being independent, having rights, so that sovereignty was filled with real content, we are for that, we aren't against that. We are for that and that's what reforms are for."]

The rioting and demonstrations along the Iranian border with Azerbaijan appear to have calmed. After talks in Moscow between Soviet and Iranian officials, Azerbaijani officials have promised that residents will be able to travel more freely to northern Iran. But overall, the situation in the region remains extremely tense.

Azerbaijani party leader Abdul Vezirov went to the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh today to negoti___ ___ ___ Armenian counter-___ ___ than meet with ___ials left.

HOWARD WOLPE
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